
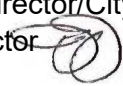




TO: Infrastructure, Planning, and Sustainability Committee
FROM: Jack C. Niehuser, P.E., Public Works Engineering Division Manager
CC: Ramiro A. Chavez, P.E. PgMP, Public Works Director/City Engineer 
Jeffrey A. Jenkins, Assistant Public Works Director 
Anna Le, Committee Liaison
SUBJECT: Fishing Wars Memorial Bridge Update
DATE: June 9, 2025

This memorandum is intended to provide project updates on the Fishing Wars Memorial Bridge.

Project Background

The **Fishing Wars Memorial Bridge** spans the Puyallup River connecting Old Highway 99 in Fife to Puyallup Avenue in Tacoma. Originally constructed over 100 years ago, the bridge has significantly deteriorated and in urgent need of replacement. The spans west of the Puyallup River (over the railroad tracks) were replaced in 2019 due to structural concerns that would have led to a bridge closure.

In November 2023, the Federal Highways Administration (FHWA) ordered closure of the remaining span over the Puyallup River, citing the need for more comprehensive inspections due to structural concerns with the fracture-critical span.

In order to properly inspect the bridge, cleaning must occur. Once cleaning and inspection has occurred, The City will address the structure's condition via two parallel tracks:

1. **Cleaning and Inspection:** reopening the bridge if inspections determine that the bridge can be reopened. Additional cost and time will be needed to design, permit, and replace any items that are currently missing or defective. Yearly inspections will be required along with a presumed bridge cleaning every two years.
2. **Replacement:** of the remaining spans over the Puyallup River and extending east into the city of Fife. The City has taken proactive steps to start design of a bridge replacement, knowing the structure is aging and will need to be replaced sooner rather than later.

Project Status

Cleaning, Inspection and Reopening (estimate cost \$4.6M)

Cleaning and Inspection (estimated cost \$3.8M)

The City is advancing a cleaning and inspection plan for the closed bridge to reassess its load-carrying capacity, with the goal of potentially reopening the bridge.

- Design Progress: The design of the cleaning containment system is at 90% and has been reviewed by Tribal staff in November 2024.
- Permitting Status:
 - City Shoreline - Exemption letter received April 2025 (expires April 2026)
 - Coast Guard - Exemption granted February 2025
 - State Fish and Wildlife – Hydraulic Permit Approval received April 2025 (expires September 2026)
 - Army Corp – Jurisdiction deferred to Coast Guard no permits required.

Anticipated Project Schedule:

- | | |
|--|----------------|
| • Bureau of Indian affairs grant application | Spring of 2024 |
| • Permit Applications | February 2025 |
| • Permits Approval | April 2025 |
| • 100% Plans & Specs | August 2025 |
| • Advertisement and Award | December 2025 |
| • Begin construction and cleaning | April 2026 |
| • Inspection and final report | August 2026 |
| • Load Rating and determination of opening* | October 2026 |

**Requires Federal Approval.*

Replacement of Missing Items (estimated cost \$800K) – Required for Reopening

If inspections determine that the bridge can be reopened, additional cost and time will also be needed to design, permit, and replace items that are currently missing, in addition to any items that may be discovered during inspection. The known scope of work currently includes:

- Replacement of the throw fence,
- Replacement of pedestrian railings, and
- Rewiring to relight the structure.

Anticipated Schedule for Replacement of Missing Items Prior to Reopening:

- | | |
|--|--------------|
| • Design Start and BNSF Permit Application | October 2026 |
| • BNSF Permit Approval | April 2027 |
| • 100% Plans & Specs | April 2027 |
| • Advertisement and Award | May 2027 |
| • Begin construction | October 2027 |

Note: Staff is assessing the possibility of reinstalling the fencing and lights concurrently with the cleaning and inspection effort to shorten the time to reopening. However, this is dependent on funding, BNSF permitting, and regulatory considerations.

Bridge Replacement (estimate cost \$300M)

In 2024, the City applied for and received a \$9 million BRAC (Local Bridge Program) grant to initiate the bridge replacement design. The 30% design contract has been negotiated with the selected consultant, HW Lochner.

Project Schedule:

- WSDOT Approval April 2025
- Council Approval May 2025
- Contract Signed and Start Design June 2025

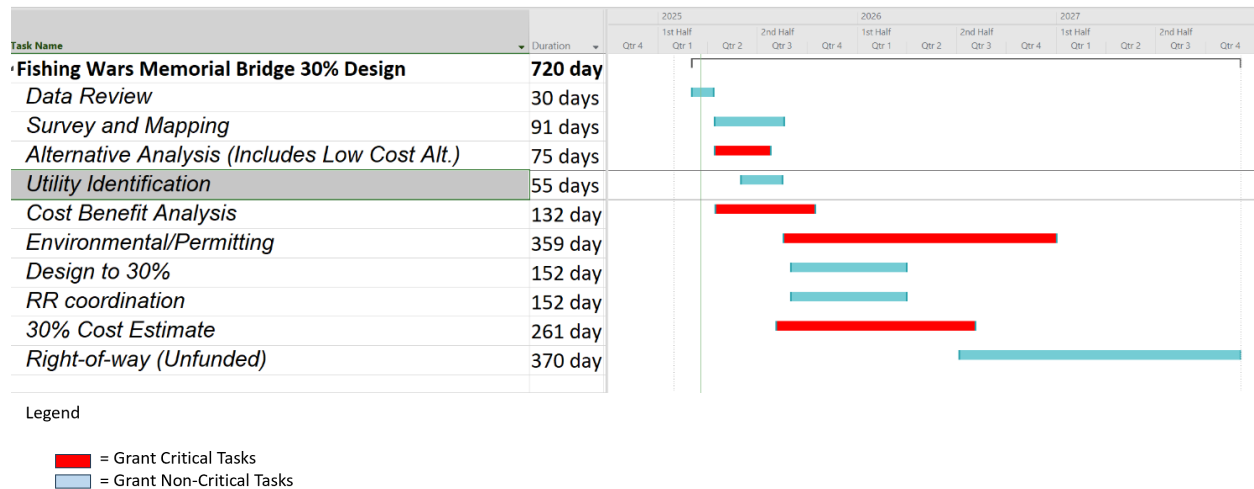
Funding Strategy for Bridge Replacement

The Plan developed for the Fishing Wars Memorial Bridge (FWMB) Project was developed to optimize federal grant funding. First among these is a federal grant that provides 60% of the \$300 million project cost. The funding strategy will prioritize identifying these key cornerstone funding sources for the bridge.

The first key to achieving this cornerstone funding is the ability to show a local match. Once these two sources are acquired other smaller federal grants can be pursued to reach the maximum 80% Federal funding share allowable. Then other smaller local and state grants can fill in the remaining pieces to the puzzle.

Success in attaining a MEGA (US Department of Transportation) grant depends on demonstrating the following elements constructability, investment readiness, and a reliable pathway to full funding.

The first element, **Demonstrating Constructability** is critical and entails having the following information in hand: a cost benefit analysis, a least cost alternative, a 30% cost estimate, and required permits. The schedule below identifies these key items and shows them being finalized near the end of 2026.



The second element **Investment Readiness** requires the City to demonstrate that it has the required local match to secure the federal cornerstone funding. For a project of this scale, the City is estimated to need approximately \$15 to \$20 million. One potential funding method for this funding is through a Transportation Infrastructure Finance and Innovation Act (TIFIA) loan.

Finally, **Demonstrating a Reliable Pathway** to funding is demonstrating and is predicated on the cornerstone funding and having a local match in place. Then the pathway to conveying a successful project to the other funding sources will fall in line. The table below lays out a possible scenario of funding the project under this strategy.

Staff also considered tolling the bridge as an alternative funding plan. Upon review it was determined that tolling is not a sound financial strategy for the construction of the FWMB Bridge. Under a tolling model, the financial obligations would extend for decades—potentially in perpetuity—without the City ever assuming ownership of the bridge. Furthermore, toll rates would be set independently, outside the City’s control, limiting our ability to manage affordability or access. With alternate routes already available and widely used, the toll bridge would likely see reduced traffic volumes, undermining the revenue projections needed to justify and sustain such a model. In short, tolling presents long-term liabilities without corresponding benefits to the City or its residents.

Target Funding Sources

Estimated Cost		\$300,000,000
Current Funding		
WSDOT Local Bridge – Federal	\$9,000,000	
City General Fund	\$500,000	
Subtotal Current Funding		\$9,500,000
Total Unfunded		
Target Funding Sources - Federal		
USDOT MEGA/INFRA	\$180,000,000	
USDOT RAISE	\$7,000,000	
BIA Tribal Transportation Program	\$6,000,000	
PSRC Surface Transportation Program - Federal	\$5,000,000	
WSDOT Local Bridge – Federal	\$16,000,000	
Subtotal Federal		\$214,000,000
Target Funding Sources- State		
Transportation Improvement Board	\$6,000,000	
Freight Mobility Strategic Investment Board	\$10,000,000	
Legislative Request	\$45,000,000	
Subtotal State		\$61,000,000
Target Funding Sources- Local/Partner		
City	\$5,500,000	
Partner	\$10,000,000	
Subtotal Local/Partner		\$15,500,000
Total Funding		\$300,000,000

Legislative Appropriation Planned Aging	
2025-2027	\$11,000,000
2027-2029	\$17,000,000
2029-2031	\$17,000,000
Total	\$45,000,000

Plan Summary

Federal Share	\$223,000,000 (75%)
State and Local Funding Sources	\$61,000,000 (20%)
City of Tacoma Funding	\$16,000,000 (5%)

Please feel free to reach out to us with any questions.